

THE GUILD Reporter

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300 N ZEEB RD # 1346
PROQUEST INFO AND LEARNING
ANN ARBOR MI 48103-1553



January 23, 2004

A Publication of The Newspaper Guild and The Communications Workers of America • Volume 71, Number 1

You win some—and some you fight

Worcester nears accord after 10 years, but two locals reject pacts

It's not a record-setter, but the possibility of a first contract in Worcester, Mass.—after more than ten years of bargaining—comes real close.

"We're very close to having something we can give to our members—basically, we've got everything except the handshake," Timothy Schick, administrative officer of the Providence Newspaper Guild, told The Guild Reporter at deadline. Indeed, the local had tentatively scheduled a ratification vote for Jan. 27; copies of the proposed agreements, covering the news room and

inside and outside circulation departments, have been posted on the local's web site.

Contract agreements also have been reached at The Halifax Herald and at the Sacramento Bee, and Guild-represented employees at the Providence Journal ended nearly four years of labor strife by overwhelmingly ratifying a new eight-year contract, 238 to 15, the details of which were described in the December Guild Reporter. But the members of two other locals have rejected tentative agreements, and Pioneer Press News employees took the additional

step of authorizing a strike against that publisher's 50 community newspapers.

News of a likely settlement at the Worcester Telegram & Gazette means an end to a decade-long marathon that began when the newsroom voted for Guild representation in October, 1993, when it was still owned by Hearst. A bit more than six years later the paper—still without a Guild contract—was sold to The New York Times. Over the next few months, both the inside and outside circulation departments decided they, too, wanted Guild representation.

And, still, no contract. "The fact that everyone hung in so long is a real testament to the strength of that unit," Schick marveled.

The four-year proposals include a first-year wage increase of 2.5%, with wage reopeners each year thereafter; increases the first year are to be pro-rated to synchronize past increases—traditionally awarded on an employee's anniversary hire date—with the contract's Sept. 1 effective date. But "me-too" clauses assure Guild members of receiving at least the same increase as is

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Health care costs take center stage

By Andy Zipser
Editor, The Guild Reporter

In the most tangible sign yet of the breakdown of the American health care system, some 70,000 grocery workers in southern California are in the fourth month of a strike and lockout. Their beef? Not the industry's notoriously low wages, but the life-and-death issue of who will pick up the tab for their health care.

Precarious though their economic well-being is, the baggers, checkers, stockers and other employees at Vons—a Safeway subsidiary—gave up their paychecks Oct. 11 rather than submit to a company demand that they pay a substantially larger share of their health care costs. The average weekly wage for Los Angeles supermarket workers is \$312; Safeway's demands, according to the United Food and Commercial Workers, would have cost them as much as \$95 a week by the end of the contract.

As soon as the UFCW-represented employees at Vons and Pavilions—another Safeway subsidiary—walked off the job, Albertsons and Kroger subsidiary Ralph's locked out their UFCW members, too. Subsequent talks, including off-the-record negotiations with a federal mediator, have produced scant results. The strike and lockout now have dragged on so long that strike pay for pickets, initially rang-

ing between \$100 and \$300 a week, has been cut up to 50%, yet as The Guild Reporter went to press there was no sign of a thaw.

The grocery chains say they have to shift their costs to compete with Wal-Mart, a notorious job market bottom-feeder whose health plan is so expensive most employees can't purchase coverage. Their argument is overstated—at this point, most southern California Wal-Marts don't sell groceries—but it does underscore the problems that arise when the cost of providing essential human services is left in the hands of profit-maximizing corporations. And while the resulting burden is shifted most readily to the weakest and poorest sectors of society, the same logic gradually filters up into the ranks of middle-class America.

Can't identify with grocery store workers? How about the IAPE-represented employees of Dow Jones, who on Jan. 16 rejected a tentative contract agreement largely because of its sizeable health care cost increases? Not only was the vote overwhelmingly one-sided, at 850 to 167, but it represented a 64% turnout of all eligible Guild members, the highest in local memory.

Indeed, rising health care costs and corporate efforts to off-load the burden to employees are an ever louder refrain in Guild contract talks nationwide. The Toledo

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Southern California supermarket strikers and supporters picket a Safeway store in the San Francisco Bay Area, where union contracts will expire

later this year. Workers at four supermarket chains have been out since Oct. 11, primarily over health-care cost-shifting efforts by their employers.

New Brunswick's 'Goliath' hit hard by Guild's 'David'

By Deborah Richmond
TNG Canada Web Editor

In a "virtually unprecedented" ruling, an arbitrator has found in favor of journalist David Francis against New Brunswick's media Goliath, awarding the type of damages for harassment and mental suffering that normally would be associated with a human rights case.

Nelson Roland, legal counsel for TNG Canada/CWA, calls the awards of \$5,000 in aggravated damages and \$20,000 in punitive damages to Dave Francis, a senior reporter at the Moncton Times & Transcript, "a stinging rebuke of the Irvings"—the powerful industrialist family that owns the newspaper, as well as most other media outlets in the province and a significant chunk of its corporate sector. "I have never seen (punitive)

damages like this. It's extremely rare. Usually you see it in human rights cases," says Roland, a veteran labor lawyer who has been involved in the arbitration for more than a year.

Francis, who had served as president of the Moncton Typographical Union in the mid-Nineties, has been struggling with clinical depression for the past decade. As outlined in testimony before arbitrator Geoff Bladon, management began to harass him in September 2001 by axing his two weekly columns, removing his byline from a number of stories, suspending him for three days and demoting him from associate editor to reporter, with a corresponding cut in wages.

Ordered off work by his family physician in mid-October, Francis filed a series of grievances alleging harassment, intimidation and dis-

crimination. In early December, concerned that his grievances might not be properly processed because the union's president had been laid off, Francis attended his first union meeting in three years—and was acclaimed as the local's new president. But that simply prompted the newspaper's notoriously anti-union management to turn up the heat.

Over the ensuing months, managers monitored Francis's activities in the community and on behalf of the union and invented and exaggerated events in their reports to the sick-leave plan's administrator, Canada Life. The fabrications were designed to support their contention that Francis was not disabled, leading to the termination of his benefit payments in mid-January 2002.

Management's behavior, arbitration ruled, was "unjustified."

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Indonesian journalist slain

One of the two journalists on whose behalf TNG-CWA Secretary-Treasurer Bernie Lunzer intervened at the Indonesian embassy in Washington, D.C. is dead.

Ersa Siregar, who was taken hostage last June by the Free Aceh Movement (GAM), reportedly died Dec. 29 in a crossfire between the rebel force and Indonesian troops. Representatives of The International Federation of Journalists had delivered petitions seeking his release to Indonesian officials worldwide Dec. 18. The IFJ, working with GAM, had negotiated conditions for the hostages' safe release last August, but charged the Indonesian government with blocking access by human rights groups that had agreed to accept the two journalists.

No word has been received on the fate of the second hostage, Fery Santoro. Prior to the Dec. 18 petitions, the IFJ had reported that the hostages' physical condition had grown "dire."

TNG-CWA President Linda Foley received a letter dated Dec. 29 from the Indonesian embassy acknowledging her and the IFJ's expressions of concern. But the demand for Indonesian government intervention "is misdirected," the letter writer averred. "Such a pressure and concern should have been more



TNG-CWA Secretary-Treasurer Bernie Lunzer delivers a letter from the International Federation of Journalists, seeking Ersu Siregar's release, to an unidentified Indonesian Embassy official.

appropriately addressed to GAM that applies the violent tactic of terrorism in trying to achieve its goal." The writer, press officer Suhardjono Sastromihardjo, added that various human rights organizations "have resumed their operations in Aceh" and that U.S. embassy representatives have been given access to the area.

Indonesia's Alliance of Independent Journalists, meanwhile, condemned both GAM and the Indonesian government, the former for taking hostages and the latter "for being so hard" and refusing to cooperate with efforts to secure their release. The group demanded an independent investigation of Ersu's death.

FAY GROWELL/WASHINGTON/BALTIMORE GUILD

Mixed results in bargaining

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awarded other unionized employees.

Other Worcester contract features include a 37.5-hour workweek, 10 paid holidays a year, six days of sick leave a year that can be banked up to 26 weeks, and one week of severance for each year worked. Vacation rights include three weeks after five years of service, four weeks after 10 and five weeks after 25.

Newsroom employees of The Halifax Herald, meanwhile, voted to accept a new four-year contract forged with the assistance of a federal mediator. The agreement

averted veiled threats of a strike, prompted by company intransigence on a pension plan that even management agreed was dreadful.

In addition to major improvements in the pension plan, the new contract includes annual pay increases of 4%, 3.55%, 3.3% and 3.3%. Mileage provisions also were improved and now are tied to gasoline prices. Local 30130, which negotiated the contract, represents approximately 100 newsroom and support staff employees at the newspaper's main office and in six regional bureaus.

Elsewhere, a three-year agreement was hammered out with the McClatchy-owned Sacramento Bee, effective this past January 1. The pact includes an average 6% increase in salary minimums, while the merit pool has been locked-in at 3% for each of the first two years of the contract. The company also agreed to pay 80% of health care premiums over the first two years of the contract, and to retain Kaiser health coverage as long as its prices remain competitive.

Other Sacramento details include an agreement to post job openings on the McClatchy intranet and to give current qualified employees first consideration when filling vacancies. The company also will require employees to get verbal permission from a supervisor before doing freelance work, but backed off a demand that such permission be in writing from the executive editor.

The labor-management relation-

ship is far less amicable at Pioneer Press Newspapers, where employees are represented by the Chicago Newspaper Guild. Although the contract that expired May 31, 2002 had been extended during contract negotiations, it was terminated by the Hollinger-owned chain Nov. 28, weeks after it had started running ads seeking replacement workers for editorial positions.

A federal mediator began meeting with both sides Dec. 3, but the proposal emerging from that process consisted mostly of Guild concessions and was rejected by the members. The company, said unit chair Lynne Stiefel, "would only accede to a few tweaks" in its pre-mediation position. Conflict over health care coverage was been cited as the biggest—although not sole—obstacle to an agreement.

Finally, Guild-represented employees at Dow Jones turned out in record numbers to reject, 850 to 167, a proposed three-year contract that would have slashed health benefits and given wage increases that lag inflation.

"This vote sends a clear message," an IAPE statement declared. "Dow Jones' management now must move promptly to resolve the current dispute." Management, on the other hand, announced that the tentative agreement "reflected the limits of the company's flexibility on the terms negotiated."

IAPE, meanwhile, has reconstituted its bargaining team, adding several new members.

Guild briefs . . .

Montreal Guild organizes ad reps

The Montreal Newspaper Guild has won a seven-year battle to unionize 46 employees in The Montreal Gazette's classified ad department. That gives it the distinction of being the first TNG Canada/CWA local to successfully conclude an organizing drive at a CanWest Global newspaper since the company acquired the Southam chain, in mid-2000. The local now represents 357 Gazette employees.

Sun lays off 7, ousts its editor

Seven Guild-represented employees of the Baltimore Sun were laid off unexpectedly Dec. 19—to be followed out the door two weeks later by editor and vice president William Marimow, who reportedly had resisted staff cuts other than through attrition. Marimow, a two-time Pulitzer Prize winner, last year served on the Haywood Brown Awards jury. Guild leaders who met with Sun management Dec. 26 said they were unable to learn why the layoffs were made, whether more layoffs can be expected or why those who were laid off were escorted out of the building.

News Media Guild moves crosstown

The News Media Guild has announced it will relocate its national headquarters to Manhattan's West Side, to 424 West 33rd Street—almost next door to the AP's new headquarters. The move is expected in April, so Guild officers can be on hand to "welcome AP to the neighborhood" when the wire service moves out of Rockefeller Center in June.

Pittsburgh paper looks for 10% cut

Following its success in winning a partial wage freeze at the Toledo Blade, the family that also owns the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette has asked its unionized employees—including those represented by the Pittsburgh Newspaper Guild—to accept an across-the-board 10% pay cut and to make monthly contributions for health care coverage. In making the mid-contract request, management has said the depressed economy and runaway health care costs are forcing its hand; union leaders have responded by requesting detailed financial data. The current Guild contract doesn't expire for another three years.

Sheboygan talks first under Gannett

Negotiations for a new contract covering 62 Guild-represented workers at the Sheboygan Press began Jan. 14, just two weeks before the current contract expires. The Guild's bar-

gaining committee is led by President Amy Bahr and includes 2nd Vice President Ron Porter and Treasurer Gary Klein. These are the first contract negotiations at the paper since it was acquired by Gannett, in 2000. The company has told the Guild it intends to seek a "merit" pay system.

Reuters pledges to heed labor law

Facing a federal complaint that they violated U.S. labor law by denying Guild members their "Weingarten rights," Reuters managers essentially agreed with the charge by formally pledging to respect employees' rights to organize, join, form or assist any union. The complaint followed management's refusal last year to permit a Guild steward to attend meetings with four Guild members who subsequently were given disciplinary warnings. The Guild is still challenging those warnings, which are scheduled for an arbitration hearing Feb. 24.

JOAs in 2 cities in the spotlight

Federal antitrust regulators paid a second visit to Seattle in mid-January, interviewing the former president of The Seattle Times in their investigation of the joint operating agreement between the Times and the Seattle Post-Intelligencer. While the Times is trying to dissolve the agreement, Justice Dept. officials are interested in allegations that Times employees may have sabotaged the relationship by not treating the P-I even-handedly. Meanwhile, the Gannett-owned Cincinnati Enquirer has announced it will not renew its JOA with the Scripps-owned Cincinnati Post when the current agreement expires, at the end of 2007. The Post's circulation, about 188,000 when JOA was created in late 1977, now stands at 42,000 on weekdays.

Media unions poll ownership issues

A telephone survey of 400 media workers nationwide to measure their understanding and concerns about media ownership issues is being underwritten by the Guild and three other media unions. The survey, comprising 50 to 60 questions, was to be conducted Jan. 25.

Kenosha elects local officers

The Kenosha Newspaper Guild elected Mika Larsen, former vice president, as its president for a one-year term that began Jan. 1. Also elected were former president Bill Siel to vice president; Patrick Marley, secretary; and John Krowicz, treasurer. The local represents editorial staffers at the Kenosha News and The Labor Paper.

ADDRESS CHANGE, SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION

The Guild Reporter (ISSN: 00175404) (CPC # 1469371) is issued monthly, generally at four-week intervals, at 501 Third St. NW, 2nd Floor, Washington, D.C. 20001.

Periodicals postage paid in Washington, D.C., and additional mailing offices. Printed in the U.S.

Postmaster: Send address changes to: The Guild Reporter, c/o Grace Corner, Communications Workers of America, 501 Third St. NW, Washington, D.C. 20001

Address changes also can be e-mailed to: duesinfo@cwa-union.org.

Subscription: \$20 a year in U.S. and Canada, \$30 a year overseas. Send subscription orders to: Tina Harrison, TNG-CWA, 501 Third Street, NW, Washington, DC 20001

Single copies: \$1.50

Journalists' personal sphere keeps shrinking

The line defining journalists' private and professional lives keeps shifting, largely in response to employers' intellectual property claims and an ever-widening definition of what constitutes a conflict of interest. The result is a remarkable shrinking of the personal sphere.

Henry Norr, who was fired last year by the San Francisco Chronicle after his high-profile participation in anti-war demonstrations, has reached an off-the-record settlement with the Hearst-owned newspaper. But Chronicle management remains unrepentant.

"The issue here was never about personal political beliefs, but rather about the Chronicle's commitment to its readers to serve as a trustworthy and objective news source," managing editor Robert Rosenthal has been quoted as saying. "To that end, the paper requires its journalists to abide by an ethical code that includes the avoidance of the appearance of a conflict in the ability to report events without bias."

Norr, it must be noted, wrote about per-

sonal technology. The Chronicle never has explained how his participation in a political demonstration might color his reporting on laptops and PDAs, except in a rather broad statement by Rosenthal that "any journalist who assumes a prominent public role in any political issue inevitably creates the appearance of that conflict."

But it's not just politics that is becoming off-limits to "any" reporter. A week after the Norr settlement was disclosed, cable channel CNBC announced it was instituting a new investment policy prohibiting senior management and "on-air talent" from owning any stocks and bonds—a prohibition that also extended to their spouses and dependents. Affected employees and their families have until next January to liquidate their holdings.

The CNBC policy was explained, again, as an effort to avoid potential conflicts of interest. But while the desire to avoid having reporters pimp their holdings is not unreasonable, financial media with considerably more

market-moving gravitas than a cable channel have established much less intrusive checks and balances. The Wall Street Journal, for example, which endured a widely reported insider-trading scandal 15 years ago involving one of its columnists, nevertheless has been satisfied with prohibiting reporters from owning stocks of companies they cover and with banning short-term trading and stock "flipping"—but that still leaves newsroom staffers a lot of investment options.

Or has until now. The Journal's owner, Dow Jones, is co-owner with General Electric's NBC of CNBC operations overseas and provides content to CNBC in the U.S. It remains to be seen whether that arrangement will pressure the Journal to adopt its cable partner's more restrictive guidelines.

This month also saw the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel assert its control over employees in a novel fashion: it announced it would no longer participate in local and state journalism contests, but instead would "apply

its resources" solely to regional and national competitions. While the wisdom of such a decision might be questioned, management's right to make it seems less debatable—until the company went a step further by also banning staffers from entering such contests on their own.

As explained by Lauria Lynch-German, president of the Milwaukee Newspaper Guild, management had decided it wanted to compete "only with our peers at the national level." Moreover, because the newspaper is copyrighted, management took the position that it now owned a reporter's work even for such purposes as contest participation and therefore could enforce a ban on individual entries.

A visit to management by "two highly regarded, let's say well-rewarded Guild members" convinced the newspaper to reverse the ban, Lynch-German says—although not its refusal to pay entry fees. Not to worry, though: the local says it will pick up half the tab for its members' entries.

Post-Dispatch drops open shop, but gulf remains



Heather Ratliff shows off one in a series of cakes she has baked marking the lack of progress in contract talks in St. Louis.

One step forward, two steps back: buffeted by bad publicity over its efforts to force an open-shop clause into its Guild contract, the St. Louis Dispatch dropped the demand just before Christmas.

The concession, raising expectations that management was about to start bargaining in good faith, prompted the St. Louis Newspaper Guild to say it would take down billboards and stop a radio ad campaign that had accused the Pulitzer-owned newspaper of union-busting. Initial optimism was further buoyed by a company contract offer that included pay raises of up to 12% over three years and scrapped a two-tiered health insurance premium that nicked newer employees.

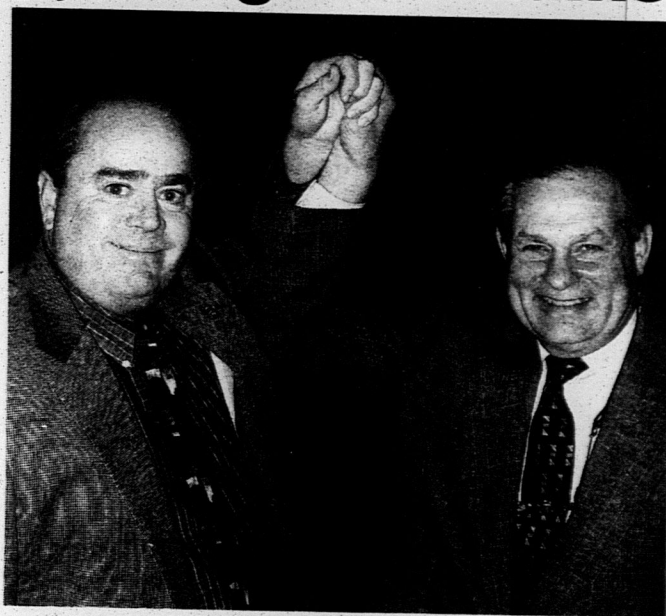
But the devil, as always, is in the details. And once Guild leaders had digested the latest offer they concluded "a large gulf" persists.

As proposed by the company, pay increases would not be spread evenly, with commissioned sales staff most notably on the short end. Moreover, annual raises would be awarded only to those earning top minimums. Progressive discipline would be replaced with a "first strike and you're out" policy. The Guild would lose jurisdiction language, giving the company complete outsourcing freedom. There would be an end to time-and-a-half pay for holiday work.

There also would be no improvement in the 401(k) plan, to which the company now contributes just \$50 per employee per month. No disability insurance was offered. An increase in each employee's \$10,000 life insurance policy was still not on the table.

"I am no lawyer, but I know horse-droppings when I see them," wrote an aggrieved Jim Klenn to his co-workers. "While the company did drop its insistence on an open shop, the current proposal is downright ridiculous in certain places."

High on the list of discontents is management's efforts to offload a significant share of its health care costs (see related story, page 1). Although now willing to end a two-tiered system it imposed



Jim Light (left) and Herb Goodrick hoist arms to celebrate Light's hiring as the St. Louis Guild's new executive secretary. A 17-year veteran of UFCW Local 655, Light emerged as the favorite in a field of six candidates to succeed Goodrick as the local's day-to-day administrative officer. Goodrick remains as point man in bargaining.

in 1994, the company is seeking to cut its share of premiums from 90% to 75% by next year, for a \$500,000 savings. Its proposal also would enable the company to change benefits and other costs—including deductibles, co-pays for drugs and maximum out-of-pocket limits—at its own discretion. The company's proposal also would

enable it to strip health-care benefits from future retirees.

"Remember, they did listen to us on the open-shop proposal when we closed ranks and showed our unity on that issue," counsels the local's newsletter, The Ruffled Feather. "Now we have to show the same resolve when it comes to closing a labor deal."

Guild joins lawsuit over secret trials

TING-CWA is one of two-dozen media and public interest groups participating in a highly unusual motion to intervene in a case already before the U.S. Supreme Court. Such motions are usually—almost invariably—made in a lower court.

But these are not usual times, as evidenced by the very name of the case, *M.K.B. v. Warden*. M.K.B. is Mohamed Kamel Bellahouel, an Algerian who was among the 1,200 Arab and Muslim men secretly detained by the government after Sept. 11. "Warden" is not a name but the former job title of Monica S. Wetzel, who worked at the Federal Correctional Institution in South Miami-Dade County.

Even that much wouldn't be known if a reporter from the Miami Daily Business Review hadn't stumbled across a court calendar on the internet that accidentally listed the names of the litigants. The names subsequently were obliterated and additional

computer records altered. An appellate court hearing last March was closed to the public and press and its records sealed.

Because of all the secrecy, little is known about the case, which appears to have been filed by Bellahouel, presumably over his unlawful detention. Bellahouel is not in federal custody and was not charged with any crime, according to the Business Review. He lives in Florida with his American-born wife, but has declined requests for press interviews.

The coalition of prospective intervenors in the case, led by the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press, says it seeks to represent the interests of the public in ensuring that court proceedings are conducted openly, in compliance with the First Amendment. "A free and open society cannot tolerate hiding federal court proceedings from public view," explained Lucy Dalglish, executive director of the Reporter's Committee.

David vs. Goliath

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trator Bladon wrote, amounted to "outrageous" and "sinister" conduct, including distribution of false and misleading information "deliberately intended to wrongly deprive the reporter" of his short-term-disability (STD) benefits.

Moreover, the arbitrator noted, "the employer was aware in the Fall of 2001 that Francis had to sell his house because of (his) precarious financial position and yet it set out to put an end to his sole source of revenue through his STD benefits."

Such conduct constituted the "intentional infliction of mental

suffering," he added.

"Some of the things they did were beyond belief," said Francis. "The lies and distortions were meant to harm me as much as possible, and nothing else. And the arbitrator saw that."

Still outstanding is a lawsuit filed by Francis against Canada Life over its handling of his disability claims. "As great as this decision is, we still have the civil lawsuit to settle, and we're hoping for more damages," Francis said. "The fact is, what the company did has resulted in the destruction of my credit rating and what we've won so far doesn't make up for that."

Democracy matters: setting the stage for labor's next upsurge

By Steve Early

As the Reagan-Bush era began to wane, 14 years ago, Hollywood released "Flashback," a film that illustrates the uncertainty of "upsurge" prognostication. An Abbie Hoffman-style 'Sixties radical, now a fugitive from old criminal charges, is being pursued by a much younger, Yuppie-ish FBI agent. At one point the ever-optimistic Hoffman character (Dennis Hopper) warns the smug, conservative G-man (Keifer Sutherland) that America's next big social and political upheaval is just around the corner.

"Once we get out of the '80s," he boasts, "the '90s are going to make the '60s look like the '50s!"

For American labor—and the left as well—this prediction didn't pan out. Despite a Democrat in the White House, a mid-decade shake-up at the AFL-CIO and some inspiring global justice mobilizations in Seattle and Quebec City, the 1990s were a period of continued decline in union membership, political influence, strike activity and negotiating clout. Making matters worse, the first few years of the new millennium have been a flashback to two decades ago.

The sense that we're moving backward—or at best just treading water—should be particularly troubling for social movement veterans who went into labor 30 or more years ago. A product of the post-war baby boom, this now-graying (or balding) group of activists had both the 1960s and the 1930s as political reference points. After participating directly in dramatic, high-profile struggles around civil rights, anti-war and women's issues, they migrated from campuses to workplaces and union halls in the 1970s, where they hoped to play a catalytic role similar to that of the Communists, Socialists, Trotskyists and anarcho-syndicalists during the Great Depression.

Unfortunately, the New Left's "long

march" through the existing institutions of American labor has slowed to a crawl. "Participatory democracy" is still not a strong feature of most unions, and no great transformative moment appears to be on the horizon. There have been existential crises, drop-outs and defections, accompanied by a healthy decline in political sectarianism, but also a less helpful tendency among some labor leftists to become so absorbed in day-to-day trade union work that, over time, they've ceased to be agents of radical change.

Dan Clawson's book, *The Next Upsurge*, ponders when, if, and how the ship will finally come in for the Class of '68 in labor, as well as for the millions of workers it once hoped to rally around slogans more stirring than "America Needs A Raise!" (which it does). Clawson believes that a "new upsurge is by no means inevitable" but is more likely than slow and incremental union growth, which has never been the pattern of American working class resurgence.

"Historically, labor has not grown a little bit each year," he observes. "Most of the time unions are losing ground; once in a while labor takes off." During these "defining bursts"—in the 1880s, between 1898 to 1904, during the 1930s, and (in the public sector) in the 1960s and '70s—mass activity by workers changed "cultural expectations, the form that unions take, laws, structure, and accepted forms of behavior. . . . [W]hat yesterday seemed impossible suddenly became commonplace."

But according to Clawson, the next great burst will not occur until these current trends are reversed: "First and foremost, the relentless employer assault, backed by government policies that support employers and attack workers; second, the drastic decline in labor's willingness and ability to mobilize; and third, a decline in rank-and-file involvement and an increasing reliance on staff and

other substitutes for worker power and solidarity."

Moreover, the author believes that labor can revive, and win "improved conditions for American workers," if it forms "alliances with other social movements;" if "those groups, not employers, have greater cultural and political momentum;" and if "a mass movement, not staff, take leadership"

That's a lot of "ifs."

Taking them one at a time, Clawson makes a convincing case for building union coalitions with social movement allies. "Perhaps the single greatest failure of the U.S. left in the past fifty years," he argues, "is the lack of connection between labor and the movements of the 1960s," a division that weakened both and contributes to the current

THE NEXT UPSURGE: Labor and the New Social Movements, by Dan Clawson. Cornell University Press. (2003) 256 pp. \$18.95 (paper)

"failure of assorted social movements to connect with each other." On a positive note, that seems to have changed under the leadership of John Sweeney's "New Voice" team, which has promoted a major labor outreach to students, immigrants, anti-globalization activists and community groups involved in local "living wage" agitation.

But Clawson has a warning bell to sound, too, as he frets that some "organizing unions" may be putting a higher priority on forming alliances with other social movements than on mobilizing their own members. As the author notes, "using militant tactics, publicity, and community alliances to protect workers rights" is no guarantee that a union will be "democratic and worker controlled."

The original Justice for Janitors contract struggle in Los Angeles was followed, for example, by an immigrant worker challenge to the leadership of the local involved. No sooner was SEIU Local 399 taken over by an opposition caucus, when it was trusteeshiped and later merged into a larger entity. (SEIU has since used trusteeships and mergers elsewhere to install non-union staff members as new building service union leaders in ever-expanding statewide and multi-state mega-locals, where incumbents will be well insulated from similar re-election threats.)

As Clawson observes, "there's something wrong when the labor movement's model campaign results in the national union not being willing to accept the election results in a local that's just been revitalized." If labor's "central premise" really is "that workers should have the right, the ability, and the power to at least participate in, and possibly to control, decisions about their work and their lives," why, Clawson asks, is the role of union members so circumscribed within their own organizations?

His book offers an interesting explanation

of this phenomenon. *Next Upsurge* notes that one of the political legacies of the 1960s was the proliferation of "public interest" and "citizen action" groups with "a strongly middle-class character." These outfits rely on a youthful, low-paid (and high-turnover) staff of recent college graduates, on social change foundation grants and on mailing lists that are utilized for "legislative alerts" and fund-raising. The typical member relates to such organizations mainly through direct mail and phone solicitation of donations—or, less frequently, door-to-door canvassing.

But "members neither hold office nor vote for the leaders" and most never even attend a meeting of the group. "For many years," Clawson observes, "the distinction was sharp and clear between the style and character of unions and citizens/public interest groups." Recently, however, the *modus operandi* of the latter seems to have been adopted by several unions in which former student activists play a key role. Rather than developing and deploying labor's "greatest source of power—the participation and solidarity of millions of members able to disrupt the economic functioning of the system," these "New Unity Partnership" affiliates are focusing more on corporate campaign research, lawsuits and symbolic protests, press conferences, ad campaigns and other staff-directed efforts to "take battles to a wider public."

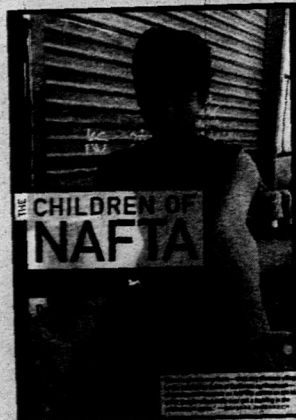
While this approach may add to an individual union's "market share" or "density" in a particular industry, it doesn't do much to lay the groundwork for a future labor upsurge—rooted, as in the past, in bottom-up mobilization and "workers' self-activity." Union staff, Clawson acknowledges, "can play a crucial role in building workers' self-confidence, abilities, power, and leadership," but "only if they organize, not lead; help workers realize their full human potential, not become the person who does everything for workers."

Likewise, the integration of labor and non-labor activism—promoted throughout Clawson's book—will not move us forward if such fusion merely takes the form of a face-lift (or, more appropriately among many unions, a tummy-tuck!).

At such a fork in the road, Clawson's book is an invaluable guide to right and wrong turns. It contains many important insights into the dynamics of labor-based movement-building—past, present, and future. It is readable, accessible, and should be studied closely by activists still seeking a favorable resolution of "the tension/contradiction between the radical democratic potential" of organized labor and the less-inspiring reality of our existing unions.

Steve Early is a Boston-based CWA representative. An expanded version of this review appears in the spring issue of *New Labor Forum*; subscription information available from customerservice@taylorandfrancis.com.

Also worth noting . . .



THE CHILDREN OF NAFTA: Labor Wars on the U.S./Mexico Border, by David Bacon. University of California Press. (2004) 348 pp. \$27.55 (hardcover)

For several years a contributor to this newspaper, freelance photojournalist David Bacon has explored border issues much longer than that. Roving throughout northern Mexico and the American southwest and West Coast, he has reported extensively on child labor, the exploitation of migrant workers and the corporate war on union organizers.

The Children of NAFTA hits the streets just in time to observe the 10th anniversary of that flawed trade treaty. But more than just exposing the devastation that has been wreaked, Bacon recounts the slow, painful process by which work-

ers in the U.S., Canada and Mexico are developing new cross-border organizing strategies in an ongoing fight for economic and social justice.

TWO-HEADED SPACE ALIEN SHRINKS LABOR MOVEMENT, by Gary Huck and Mike Konopacki. Capitalism Sucks Press. (2003) 112 pp. \$14.95 (paper)

The "two-headed space alien" is, of course, the duo so closely identified with each other that some fans think there's just one cartoonist, named Huck Konopacki. And since the labor movement has been shrinking ever since they started their partnership, 20 years ago, it's clear there must be a causal link. Or so they'd have us believe. . . .

You've seen some of these cartoons in *The Guild Reporter*; now you can see the rest.

Trashy Journalism for the Working Class

TWO-HEADED SPACE ALIEN SHRINKS LABOR MOVEMENT

And threatens to redouble its efforts for another twenty years!

LABOR CARTOONS BY GARY HUCK AND MIKE KONOPACKI, VOLUME 5

How the news media converted democracy into consumerism

By Andy Zipser
Editor, The Guild Reporter

The idea that "news" today is little more than mercantilism run amok is not original. From "stories" about new products to breathless narratives about celebrity to a relentless glorification of wealth, the mass media are awash with the message that the key to success and happiness is consumption—of goods, of exotic experiences, of attention. Throw in the increasingly concentrated corporate ownership of the mass media—only a dozen media conglomerates now control just about every media sector—and no reasonable person can be surprised at the lack of serious challenges to the status quo.

But as Christopher Martin makes clear in *Framed!*, such observations simply acknowledge the obvious. The more subtle dynamic is that by addressing readers and viewers as consumers, rather than as citizens, our broadcast and print media marginalize class dissent, discredit organized labor's values and reinforce the legitimacy of the controls established by the rich and powerful. That all this is accomplished under cover of the seemingly unsailable principle of reportorial "objectivity" only strengthens the corporate stranglehold on discourse.

Among the notable casualties of this state of affairs is organized labor, which despite a deepening malaise for the nation's working class has been unable to capture the public agenda. "With increasing economic inequality among classes . . . stagnant or declining wages and benefits, the greatest work load of any advanced economy . . . the conditions would seem ripe for a nationwide examination and discussion of the one institution that has historically worked to remedy these problems for the American worker—labor unions," Martin writes. "Why, then, isn't this happening?"

Mostly, he decides, because the media have slipped into describing the world from a consumer perspective. And while a consumer-oriented framing of labor stories can be "objective" on its own terms, all perspectives embody values and have consequences. "Thus, the news media cover strikes, lockouts, shutdowns, and protests largely based on the relevance of the conflict to the interests of the consumer—that is, the impact of the conflict on such things as the price, quality, and availability of consumable goods and services and on the consumer

economy at large," Martin observes. Left out or minimized in such coverage, meanwhile, are the problems that prompted such actions in the first place—be they work safety, outsourcing, low pay or any of a dozen other critical issues—because they seem largely irrelevant to shoppers. The primary concern of the latter, the media emphasize, is coping with inconvenience.

We saw this last year, for example, when the West Coast longshore workers were locked out—and the dominant news theme was how the labor dispute was going to affect the Christmas shopping season. We see it repeatedly in stories about the troubled airline industry, as in the USA Today story

FRAMED! Labor and the Corporate Media, by Christopher R. Martin.
Cornell University Press. (2004)
248 pp. \$19.95 (paper)

that began by focusing not on those involved in a strike but on a "typical consumer":

Paul Dean, 38, of Silver Spring, Md., didn't get to Dallas on American Airlines Thursday.

But his luggage did.

It was left on a jet that was empty of fliers because American Airlines didn't have flight attendants to fly with it. "This is a disaster," Dean said. . . .

Such narrative forms, Martin writes, are meant to give individual events and circumstances meaning. They make sense of events—but "sense" always implies a set of values and perspectives. And in dissecting news coverage of major labor stories during the 'Nineties, Martin identifies five major frames that set the boundaries of public discourse:

- **The consumer is king**—and therefore "treating the individual consumer as a haloed entity is the unstated assumption of all news." Americans are told they can "vote" with their pocketbooks, transforming an essentially mercantile decision based on incomplete knowledge (see next item) into the highest form of civic virtue.

- **The process of production is none of the public's business**—the consumer's role is to decide whether or not to buy a product. But whether a garment is made in a sweatshop or what chemicals are put in cigarettes are the kinds of questions the consuming public isn't expected to ask—and indeed, that corporations will lobby fiercely to keep secret.

- **The economy is driven by great business leaders and entrepreneurs**—as anyone picking up a copy of *Forbes* or *Fortune* can readily see. Why bother talking about average workers when the heroic CEO is so much more important, and fabulously rich to boot?

- **The workplace is a meritocracy**—good people rise to the top (with the very best becoming heroic CEOs) and everyone gets what he or she deserves. Moreover, "working is like consumption—an individual choice. If people don't like their job, they should get another."

- **Collective economic action is bad.** For one thing, it runs counter to the "consumer is king" view, which stresses individual action. Dissatisfied with work place conditions? Be a man: tell your boss to "take this job and shove it."

But collective action also threatens the meritocracy paradigm and therefore would upend the whole apple cart. No surprise, then, that collective labor action is described by the media as inflationary, protectionist, naïve, disruptive to consumers, leads to violence—hell, it's just plain un-American. "Whereas businesses are the visible creators credited with the achievements of the consumer economy," Martin writes, "organized labor is almost always portrayed as an impediment for the consumer."

Union activists who have smarted for years from coverage of this sort may have no more than an "ah-ha" moment in reading Martin's analysis. Reporters and editors who pride themselves on having professional standards of "objectivity," on the other hand, may need to read his five case studies to be convinced. The evidence he musters, however, is persuasive. And damning.

Major media coverage of the way General Motors whipsawed two of its production plants between 1991 and 1994, at Willow Run and Arlington, "set up the classic horse race frame that typifies coverage of political elections." Accepting GM's decision to close one of the two plants as inevitable, the media focused entirely on which of the two labor locals would demonstrate greater "flexibility" in responding to new economic realities. The fact that the "loser" in this artificial race was the more profitable plant was scarcely noted, supplanted by praise for the

Arlington local's eagerness to make numerous workplace concessions even though GM's "official" position was that concessions were not an issue. But while GM skillfully promoted a divide-and-conquer strategy that had workers fighting among themselves, the news coverage stressed the "teamwork" and "cooperative spirit" in Arlington.

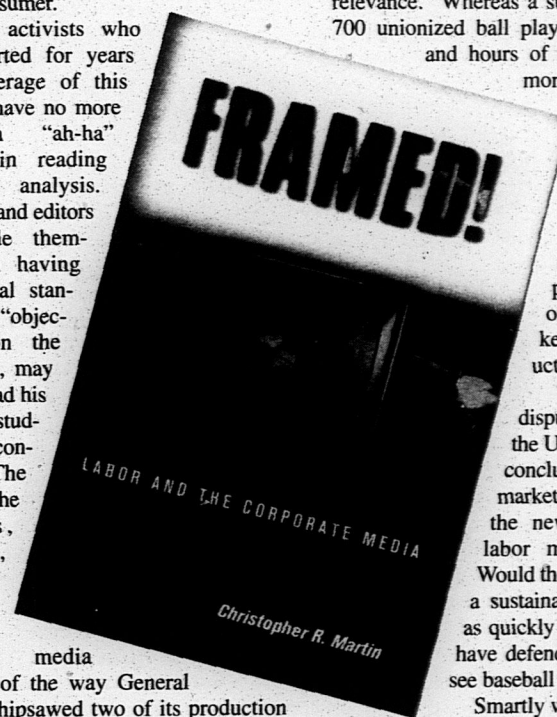
The 1993 strike by flight attendants at American Airlines, meanwhile, was framed largely as "a story of consumer inconvenience and expense, precluding rational-critical debate of class and compensation issues in the airline industry or of the way in which the airline industry had been managed since its deregulation in 1978." Indeed, much of the news coverage emphasized the possible savings to frequent fliers if management prevailed. "Thus, from a journalistic standpoint, advocating a cost-cutting strategy that undermines labor is not necessarily a probusiness bias (although it is) but an acceptably objective, neutral, proconsumer position," Martin writes. "In other words, the consumer-oriented ends justify the anti-labor means."

Turning to the 1994-95 baseball strike, Martin observes that the amount of news coverage a labor dispute receives is directly related to "the level of presumed consumer relevance." Whereas a strike idling perhaps 700 unionized ball players received pages

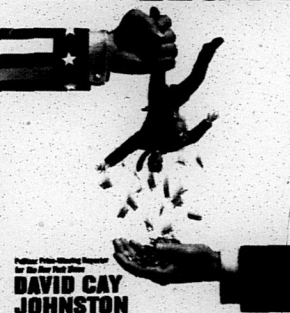
and hours of news coverage for months on end, a several-year lockout of roughly the same number of Midwestern industrial workers got a big yawn, as no one noticed any particular disruption of the consumer market for corn by-products.

"This is how labor disputes are covered in the United States," Martin concludes. "The consumer marketplace is defended by the news media, but the labor marketplace is not. Would the news media defend a sustainable minimum wage as quickly and actively as they have defended a fan's desire to see baseball games?"

Smartly written and well documented, *Framed!* suffers a few minor flaws, including a description of the Detroit JOA as "federally imposed." But it raises significant questions for journalists, and not just in terms of how they do their jobs. To what extent, for example, are Guild-represented reporters handicapped—as trade unionists—by the frames through which they view the world as journalists? Can those who accept a consumer perspective ever see themselves as engaged in class struggle?



PERFECTLY LEGAL

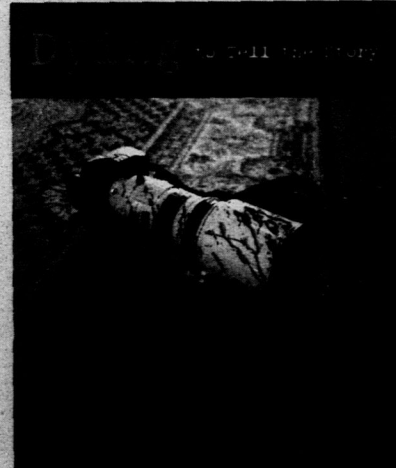


PERFECTLY LEGAL: The Covert Campaign to Rig Our Tax System to Benefit the Super Rich—and Cheat Everybody Else, by David Cay Johnston. Portfolio. (2003) 338 pp. \$25.95 (hardcover)

A New York Times reporter and Pulitzer Prize winner, Johnston has been dissecting the U.S. tax system for nearly a decade. The result: a detailed indictment of both major parties for systematically corrupting the tax code to benefit the truly wealthy. Especially worth reading is Chapter 7, The Stealth Tax, which describes how an increasing number of middle class Americans are being hit with a tax originally designed to ensure that millionaires pay their fair share. Johnston's insights are of such widespread concern that the AFL-CIO and TNG-CWA will be hosting a book-signing March 3 to further promote his book.

DYING TO TELL THE STORY: The Iraq War and the Media: A Tribute. Foreword by Chris Cramer. International News Safety Institute. (2003) 226 pp. 20 Euros (paper)

As evidence accumulates of official complicity in the deaths of journalists covering the invasion of Iraq (see page 6), the International News Safety Institute has published a tribute on behalf of the fallen. The 16 correspondents, reporters, cameramen, translators and support staff who died between March 22 and May 9 "was the worst catalogue of deaths in so short a time span in media history," Cramer observes—and the toll continues to rise. The inevitable question that arises from this litany, also explored in *Dying to Tell the Story*: is the U.S. government sanctioning an open season on journalists to control news coverage?



News round-up

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Acting on an AFL-CIO complaint, a federal judge has blocked the Bush Administration for one year from implementing new reporting requirements for national and local unions. The new rules had been scheduled to take effect Jan. 1, or roughly two months after they were announced, which the court agreed gave unions insufficient time to comply. The court reserved opinion on the broader legal issue of whether the rule was arbitrary and capricious, as well as on the AFL-CIO's request for a permanent injunction. The Bush administration announced the new rules less than 24 hours after the U.S. House of Representatives, spurred by union-member lobbying, voted to block its attack on overtime pay.

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A federal district court judge in New Jersey has thrown out a lawsuit by Verizon Wireless against CWA over the union's parody of the "Can you hear me now?" slogan. The complaint grew out of contract bargaining in 2002, when CWA ran television, radio and newspaper ads questioning the company's labor policies and asking, "Verizon: Can you hear us now?" The answer, apparently: yes.

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Wal-Mart's own audit finds violations

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State of the Union:

Fewer jobs, stagnant minimum wage, loss of overtime

The by-now clichéd "jobless recovery" deepened in December, as the unemployment rate dipped to 5.7% from 5.9%—not because people were finding jobs, but because an estimated 300,000 simply gave up looking for work. Moreover, the Bureau of Labor statistics reported, one in every four unemployed workers has been out of a job more than 26 weeks, which means his or her unemployment benefits have run out.

U.S. unemployment figures reflected a job gain of just 1,000 last month, bringing the total number of new jobs in the six months after the last tax bill took effect to 221,000. Those tax cuts were sold to Congress with the claim that they would generate an average of 306,000 new jobs per month over and above an expected 3% baseline growth in the job market. All told, the Bush administration projected that the economy would add 1.8 million new jobs by the end of 2003.

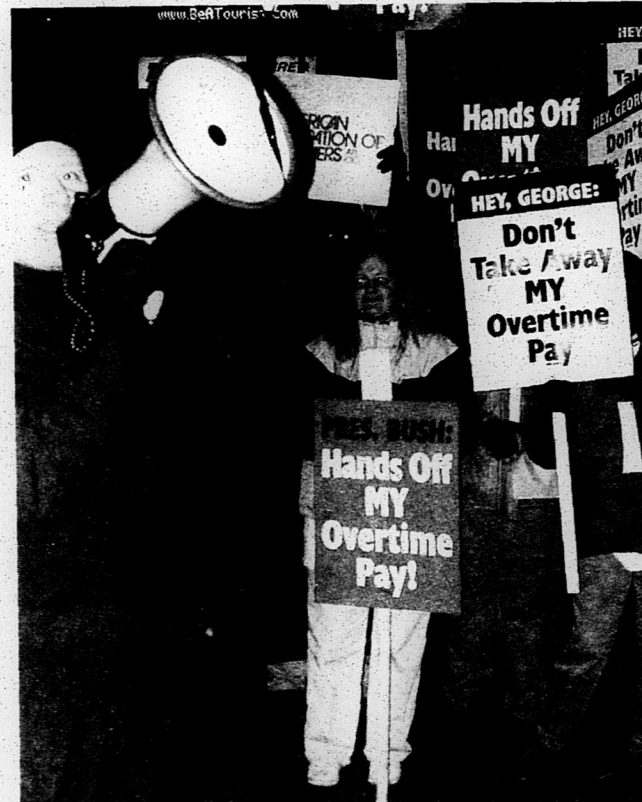
The lack of vigorous job growth leaves the U.S. with a net loss of 2.4 million jobs since Bush took office. Payrolls now have declined for two consecutive years, the first time that's happened since 1944-45. Job losses have been matched by a decline in weekly hours worked, resulting last month in a \$2 decline in average weekly wages, according to the Economic Policy Institute.

Meanwhile, the minimum wage in both Canada and the U.S. continues to lose value. Canadian minimums, set by each province, averaged \$6.50 an hour at the end of 2002, ranging from a minimum of \$5.90 in Alberta to \$8 in British Columbia. Canada's minimum wage for those working full-time year-round was 34% of the country's median wage last year—or 14th on a list of 17 industrialized countries. The U.S., meanwhile, came in 13th on the same list, but continues to lose ground. The last minimum wage increase was signed into law in 1996 and has remained at \$5.15 an hour ever since.

Although Bill Clinton called for a \$1 hike in the minimum wage in his State of the Union Address five years ago, the only increases have occurred on a state and local level, creating a growing patchwork of minimums across the country. In Illinois, for example, the minimum increased to \$5.50 on Jan. 1 and will jump to \$6.50 next year. Rhode Island's minimum went from \$6.15 an hour Jan. 1 to \$6.75. Ballot measures to increase the minimum are being pushed elsewhere—including the battleground state of Florida.

Yet even as labor activists struggle to raise the living standards of those at the bottom of the economic heap, the Bush administration and its Republican congressional allies find novel ways to keep them down. The cynical effort to revise overtime rules, for example, finally was exposed in an Associated Press story by Leigh Strobe,

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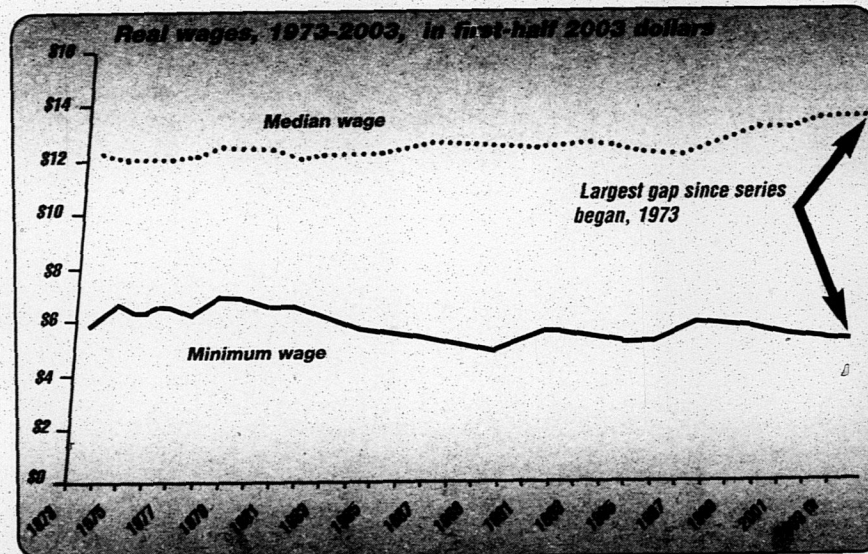


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Despite widespread opposition to the changes, the department has said it plans to issue the new rules by the end of March. If the changes are not amended, they also could eliminate overtime pay for workers earning more than \$65,000 a year. Altogether, say critics, more than 8 million workers who currently are eligible to get time-and-a-half wages for hours worked beyond 40 hours in a week would lose that protection. The only remaining obstacle to the change is a vote in the Senate, but the AFL-CIO has indicated a court fight might be in the works.

While administration officials publicly defend the overtime changes as benefitting low-wage workers, the list of those urging their implementation is not one that could be characterized as labor's champions. Among them: the National Retail Federation and the National Restaurant Association, both of whose members employ the nation's lowest wage earners, as well as the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the National Association of Manufacturers.



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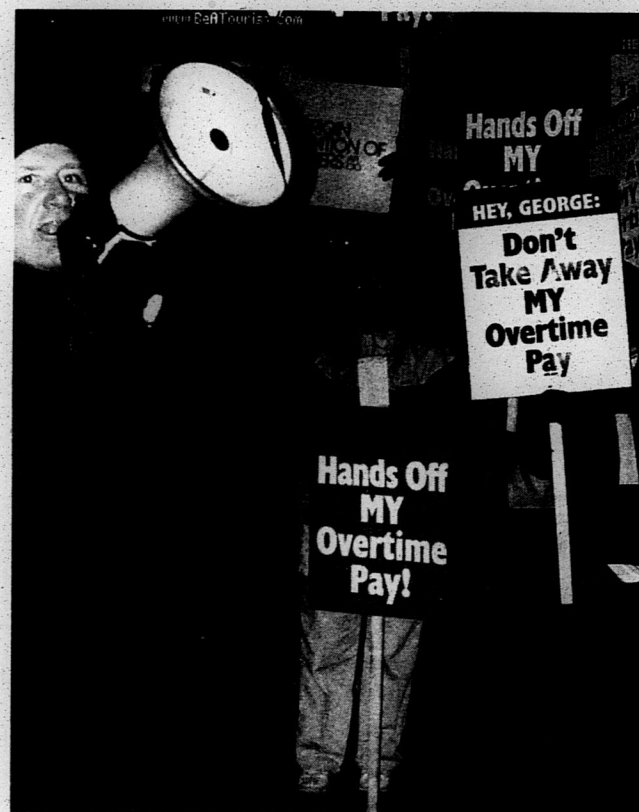
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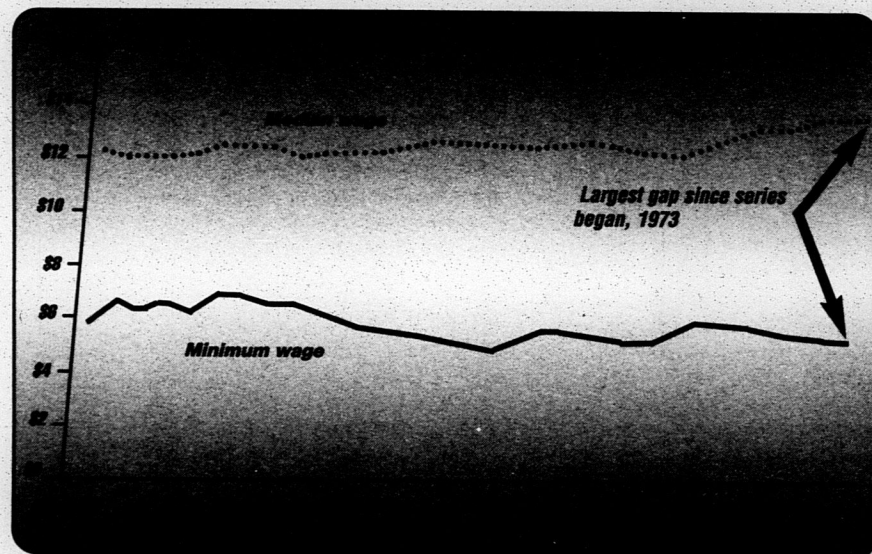


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LOOKING AHEAD

Kelley fracas shows union's worth

By Linda Foley, President



The reporters at USA Today have no union representation. So it's hard to know what really drove Pulitzer Prize-finalist Jack Kelley to resign.

But public reports about the incident do make one thing clear. The Gannett flagship newspaper's investigation of him created a no-win situation for the 21-year reporting veteran of several wars, Somalia, the West Bank and Cuba.

According to The Washington Post, USA Today launched an investigation of Kelley after an anonymous letter accused him of making up a story. Kelley apparently had to scramble to produce "witnesses" to events such as his narrow escape from the bombing of a Jerusalem café, the night launching of a Cuban boatlift to Miami and his interviewing of refugees in the Balkans.

(Even the most deskbound of editors surely understand that when a reporter covers war and violence, particularly in countries where citizens are terrorized daily, he or she is lucky to keep their own wits about them let alone line up witnesses who can later attest to every word reported.)

No corrections or retractions have been published, and Kelley steadfastly has stood by the accuracy of his stories. However, as USA Today dogged him and his sources for seven months (they assigned a fellow reporter to do their "digging" and allegedly hired private investigators), Kelley panicked, he told the Post. And when he couldn't find the original translator he had used to do the Balkan interviews, he asked someone else to pretend she was there and to vouch for him.

Aha. They got him. Just like Ken Starr got Bill Clinton. But like Clinton, Kelley never would have been pressured to produce

witnesses and subsequently to fabricate one had Gannett never questioned the validity of his stories in the first place.

A self-righteous USA Today is standing by the "fairness" of its investigation. Fine, except Kelley's credibility—along with USA Today's—has been seriously damaged because of what many reporters have characterized as a "witch hunt."

Now come the predictable laments about the onslaught of ethical lapses and credibility gaps of reporters. And the inevitable comparisons to the infamous case of Jayson Blair and his charade at the New York Times.

Except that this is different. Gannett concluded that an anonymous letter was enough to assume Kelley was guilty unless he could produce proof he didn't fabricate quotes and stories. The New York Times, on the other hand, bent over backwards to give Blair the benefit of the doubt—too much benefit, as it turned out.

Blair was presumed innocent until

proven guilty; Kelley had to prove his innocence or he was presumed guilty. That's because in Blair's newsroom, a Guild contract required that no one be disciplined or dismissed without "just and sufficient cause," a legal term that means, among other things, that those doing the firing must justify their actions. Not the other way around.

In Kelley's case, Gannett really cut him no slack. His years of service and stellar journalistic record didn't matter. The fact that he risked his life all over the globe to get good stories for USA Today meant nothing. They decided to go after him, and they got him.

As one would imagine, it's rumored that morale at USA Today has been severely affected by this, just like the morale of journalists at the New York Times suffered in the wake of the Blair incident. Times reporters were angry and demanding of answers and changes. USA Today reporters may be angry, but they are also fearful. Fearful that they could be next.

'It's a free country' not the same as 'free ride'

By Jonathan Tasini

I mourn for the idea of freedom. It's a powerful, great philosophical notion. Yet too often, I find myself cringing when I hear the words "free" or "freedom" because the words are used to express truly dreadful, selfish, reactionary sentiments.

To wit: A few weeks ago, Chris Matthews, the host of MSNBC's *Hardball*, was badgering Howard Dean about unions. "Do you accept the right of right-to-work states to say you don't have to join a union?" Matthews asked. In essence, he was demanding that Dean declare whether he would emulate Richard Gephardt's pledge: that if elected president, he would eliminate laws that allow workers to dodge paying their fair share of the cost of getting better working conditions for everyone.

There is no such thing as the open shop, really. There is a union shop and a non-union shop. Everybody that believes in the open shop disbelieves in the union shop, whatever they say; and I do not say that unions are perfect, they are not. The people that work with them know [that] better than anyone else. They are just doing the best they can with the job they have, which is a hard one, and with the material they have, which is not perfect. . . . It is one of the necessary things in the industrial world, and the fight is between those who believe in them and those who disbelieve in them.

—excerpted from testimony before the U.S. Senate Commission on Industrial Relations by Clarence Darrow, 1915.

Dean had a hard time with the question, suggesting that while he personally did not like "right-to-work" laws, he would leave it to states to do what they saw fit. But, in a moment of clarity, he observed, "The union is out there negotiating for your wage increases. Why should you get a free ride? Why should you be able to go to work for that company, get the same benefits as everybody else who paid their union dues and you paid nothing?" And a moment later: "... why should they get the benefits of everybody who is paying dues and get a free ride?"

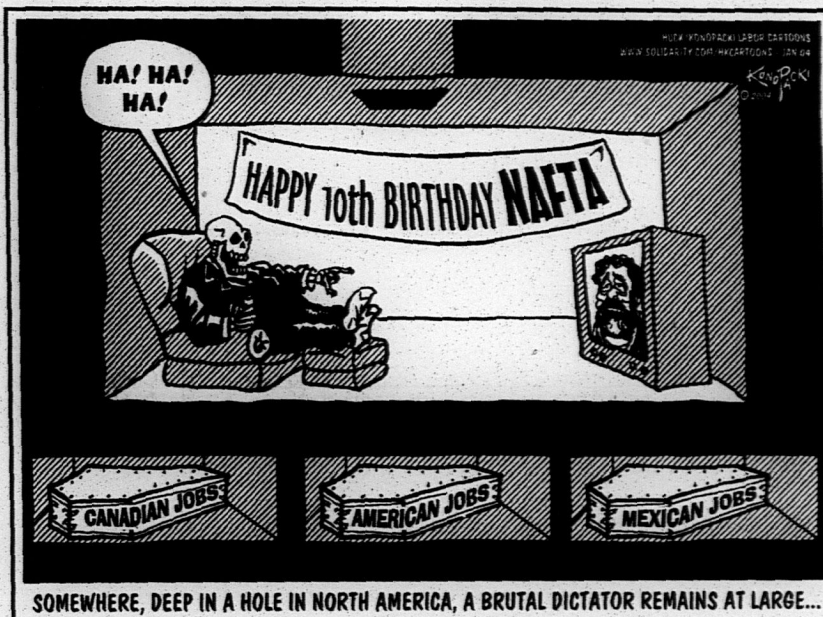
Matthews responded: "Because it's a free country."

Nonsense. We don't have, nor should we have, a "free country" when it comes to responsibility for assuming our fair share of the burden of making our society a better place to live. The lesson we learn from Matthews' careless—charitably speaking—comment is that in his America, "free country" is getting something for nothing. Divorced from a discussion about unions, I'm sure that Matthews and others would rail against anyone getting a "free" anything (think of how they would view welfare).

What kind of message does a Matthews-like comment send to young people? On the one hand, we tell children that they have to play well with others, share their toys, do well in school because there's no "free ride" out in the adult world—that they will reap the benefits of society only by putting out some effort. Yet, in Matthews' "free country," when it comes to union dues it's "let someone else shoulder the yoke while you glide on the sweat of others."

If people who were in the minority when the union was chosen by the majority should not be forced to pay taxes, I'm wondering whether Matthews thinks it's okay for those of us who did not vote for the current president to stop paying taxes? After all, the president is working for all Americans. But why not let the majority pay taxes and let the rest of us pass (okay, the current president wasn't chosen by a majority of people, but let's ignore that technicality)?

The invocation of "free country" as a



reason not to pay union dues has two close rhetorical cousins. The first is "free market." There is no such thing as a truly free market. But as a purely ideological rant, the "free market" message is "let each individual do as she or he pleases, with no regard to the effect it has on other people." In practice, of course, the "free market" benefits those who control the levers of the economy, allowing them to reap even more benefits at the expense of the rest of us.

The other cousin in this rhetorical "family" is the very effective attack against taxes waged by conservatives for the past several decades. It isn't far from Matthews' view that people shouldn't have to pay their fair share for a workplace safety net, to the parallel view that no one should be required to support the broader social infrastructure, either—an infrastructure we all use, without always being

aware of it, every day of our lives.

In both cases, inside the workplace and out, the message is: we don't owe each other anything. And in some ways that's the point. When we go to work we join a community, in the same way we might join a health club: we choose to work at a particular place and there are, and should be, fees that make it possible for that community to thrive, grow and provide benefits for future users. Right-to-work laws are un-American and unpatriotic because they undermine fundamental values of community that have been the bedrock of the nation.

Tasini, former president of the National Writers Union, is national director of American Rights at Work. A version of this commentary was first published on TomPaine.com

LETTER

To the Editor,

Kudos for publishing Stephen Singer's letter in the Nov. 21 issue. Like Singer, I was "ashamed" and "embarrassed" that The Guild Reporter published the "Project Censored" findings. Journalism has enough trouble warding off charges of "liberal bias." We don't need to help it along.

Also, like Singer, I worked for the AP. My

tenure may have made me overly conscious of the sacred trinity of balance, objectivity and fairness. I hope not. I didn't think that such fears were possible until I heard the term "the cult of objectivity," as though anyone who observes such rules was a fanatic.

—James O. Clifford Sr. (UPI-AP, ret.)
Redwood City, CA

By TNG Convention action, letters to the editor shall be limited to 200 words and shall avoid libel and subjects detrimental to the Guild. Members subjected to personal attack shall be given opportunity to reply in the same issue, but publication of either attack or reply shall not be delayed longer than one issue.

Deadline: Friday before publication. (Next deadline: Feb. 20.) Letters and articles proposed for publication may be e-

mailed to the editor at azipser@cwa-union.org.

For address changes, see the box on page 2 or e-mail to duesinfo@cwa-union.org; sending such changes to the editor will merely delay processing.

World's unions blast U.S. labor law

Just in time for the Jan. 14-16 review of U.S. practices by the World Trade Organization, the world's largest confederation of trade unions issued a highly critical report of U.S. enforcement of internationally recognized labor rights.

Noting that the U.S. is the world's largest single economy and its largest trading party, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions—of which the AFL-CIO is a member—nevertheless observed that it has ratified only two international labor conventions. Eight such conventions were adopted by the U.N.'s International Labor Organization and were subsequently affirmed by the first WTO Ministerial Conference, in 1996, then reaffirmed in 2000.

But as the ICFTU report makes clear, the U.S. refuses to live up to its responsibilities even as labor rights in the country continue to deteriorate. Specifically:

- The U.S. has not ratified Convention

No. 87 on the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize, nor Convention No. 98 on the Right to Organize and Collective Bargaining.

Although the National Labor Relations Act is the primary U.S. labor law, it excludes substantial categories of workers, including agricultural and domestic workers, supervisors and independent contractors. In addition, only 40% of all public sector workers have the right to bargain collectively, for a total of 32 million civilian workers who have no right under any law to negotiate their wages, hours or terms of employment.

Meanwhile, those workers who have such rights must claim them under an NLRA-prescribed process that employers routinely pervert: union supporters are fired in one of every four organizing campaigns, 75% of employers hire outside consultants to derail such campaigns, 92% force employees to attend closed-door meetings to

hear anti-union propaganda. "In practice," the report observes, "the right to organize is often violated and sanctions on employers in cases of violations do not provide sufficient deterrents. The right to strike is recognized but restricted."

- The U.S. has not ratified Convention No. 100 on Equal Remuneration, nor Convention No. 111 on Discrimination (Employment and Occupation).

The U.S. has addressed issues of discrimination and pay equity in a series of laws, including Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, the Age Discrimination in Employment Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Equal Pay Act of 1963. Yet despite these legislative milestones, pay inequities remain marked. Forty years after passage of the Equal Pay Act, for example, women still are paid only 76 cents of every dollar paid to men. The discrepancies are seen across all occupational categories: female physicians

in 1999 were paid 62.5% of the average wage paid to male physicians, while among sales occupations the corresponding statistic was 59.9%.

Discriminatory wage patterns are even more pronounced among minority workers. In 2000, for every \$1 in median white male pay, black men received 78.2 cents; Hispanic men, 63.4 cents; white women, 72.2 cents; black women, 64.6 cents; and Hispanic women, 52.8 cents.

- The U.S. ratified Convention No. 182, the Worst Forms of Child Labor Convention, in 1999; it still has not ratified Convention No. 138, the Minimum Age Convention.

ILO statistics showed 8.4 million economically active children in the U.S. between the ages of 16 and 19 in the year 2000; somewhere between 300,000 and 800,000 of them were in agriculture, which is second only to mining in providing hazardous work conditions. More than 100 were killed on the job.

Pressure grows for national health care plan

Continued from page 1

Guild, for example, counted its recently concluded negotiations as a victory—despite agreeing to a three-year wage freeze and higher health insurance deductibles—because the company agreed to cover almost all insurance cost increases during that time.

An analysis of the problem by Marty Demgen, a local representative at the Twin Cities Guild, opens with the observation that when union negotiators talk shop, "talk invariably moves quickly to member health care premiums. Some rightfully state that these premium increases are offsetting much of bargained wage hikes," he adds. "Others, like myself, maintain that these costs are, in many cases, crippling the entire bargaining process."

Case in point: the St. Paul Pioneer Press, where the last set of contract talks ended on a sour note because of company insistence on several give-backs. Among them was a 50% increase in the health plan cost-sharing formula, which, when applied to two consecutive years of cost increases of more than 20%, has produced what Demgen describes as "imminent, catastrophic effects on Pioneer Press Guild members." The upshot is that employees of the Knight Ridder-owned Pioneer Press pay, on average, about twice as much in health care premiums as their peers across the river, at the McClatchy-owned Minneapolis Star Tribune.

The health care squeeze, as illustrated by the grocery workers' struggle, is two-fold. On the one hand, the U.S. remains the only industrialized country in the world without a national health care system, leaving costs subject to the vagaries of an imperfect market in which the customers—patients—usually have artificially limited choices and little access to relevant information. The suppliers, meanwhile—hospitals, drug companies, insurance companies, HMOs—have few effective price restraints. The inevitable result is health care cost increases that regularly outstrip overall economic growth: the U.S. now spends 15% of total gross domestic product on health care, according to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, an amount equal to \$5,440 per person in 2002.

Further adding to costs is the sheer wastefulness of the current, jerry-rigged system. A Harvard Medical School study, for instance, concluded that the U.S. spends \$209 billion a year on useless health-care paper work, tripling the cost of treating an American patient compared to one in Canada. One example: WellPoint in the U.S. had an administrative staff of 13,900 for 10.1 million customers, while the Ontario Health Insurance Plan covered a slightly larger population—11.7 million—with a staff of 1,400.

But as costs go up, the U.S. default position of privatized health insurance is breaking down because employers are balking at the

higher bills. Indeed, the Commonwealth Fund, a private foundation that supports independent research on health and social issues, reports that 32% of all uninsured workers in 2001 were employed by big companies.

Enrollment in health plans offered by employers fell in 2001 and in 2002 because of rising unemployment, but also because some workers dropped coverage they could no longer afford. Wal-Mart, again, is the prototypical example, although it's hardly alone: the retailer requires its workers, on average, to pick up 42% of the total cost of their health coverage, or roughly twice the average of all large employers. As a result of such practices, the number of medically uninsured Americans is back on an upswing and approaching 44 million.

Employers also are whacking retiree health plans. Roughly 10% of companies with more than a thousand employees eliminated such coverage in just the past year, according to a recent study by the Henry Kaiser Family Foundation, and another 20% are expected to do so over the next three years. Meanwhile, of those that continue to offer retiree coverage, 71% hiked premiums last year and 86% plan to do so over the next three years.

Diminished coverage is even more extreme at the economic fringe, as exemplified by the grocery worker strike. Workers with the lowest fifth in incomes spent approximately 17% of their 2002 after-tax earnings

on health care—or simply went without.

If employers are no longer willing to keep up their end of the social contract they accepted after World War II, the U.S. finally may have to adopt some kind of national health plan. Just such a step was urged in mid-January by the National Academy of Sciences, which concluded after three years of research that "lack of health insurance for tens of millions of Americans has serious negative consequences and economic costs, not only for the uninsured themselves but also for their families, the communities they live in, and the whole country."

Although Canadian members of the Guild have enjoyed the benefits of a nationalized health care system for several decades, U.S. opponents of such a plan frequently claim it results in health care "rationing" and lower overall levels of care. Statistics comparing U.S. and Canadian outcomes, however, don't support the argument: infant mortality rates are lower and life expectancy is longer in Canada than in the U.S. And while middle class U.S. and Canadian residents have similar odds of surviving cancer, those in the bottom one-third of the socio-economic ladder have a 35% better survival rate north of the border than south of it.

Which may explain as nothing else why the grocery workers are fighting for their scraps of health care coverage, and why the rest of us should pay attention.

THE GUILD Reporter

Official publication of
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Volume 71, Number 1

JANUARY 23, 2004

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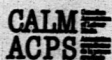
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DAYBOOK

Convergence 2 Strategic Forum,
Jan. 23-25, Baltimore

Deadline for Broun, Barr award
entries, Jan. 30 (postmark)

New Local Officers' Seminar,
Feb. 13-16, Meany Center

Great Lakes District Council,
Feb. 28-29, Akron, Ohio

Amer. Copy Editors Society,
March 18-20, Houston

CWA Legislative Conference,
March 28-31, Washington, DC

CWA Civil Rights Conference,
April 22-25, Jacksonville, FL

Freedom Award banquet,
May 19, Washington, DC

2004 UNITY Convention,
Aug. 4-8, Washington, DC

TNG Sector Conference,
Aug. 26-28, Anaheim, CA

FROM THE MORGUE

Seventy years ago this month:

Guild leaders meet twice with President Roosevelt to critique a proposed "code" of business pactices for the newspaper industry, complaining of numerous ambiguities, the lack of a 40-hour week and enforcement mechanisms that rely on publishers policing themselves. . . The American Newspaper Guild assumes responsibility for publishing The Guild Reporter, which had been launched by the Newspaper Guild of New York. . . The Association of Teachers of Journalism, meeting in a convention in Chicago, adopts a resolution endorsing the Guild's principles and "highly commends the recognition of the professional nature of journalistic endeavor."

Fifty years ago this month:

Several Guild members protest a December article in The Guild Reporter that ran under the headline, "Mixed' News Team Finds Negro Gets Raw Deal." The 12-part series it described, reported by Carl Rowan and photographed by Bonham Cross, ran as the U.S. Supreme Court was pondering *Brown v Board of Education*. . . Citing economists' predictions of a recession, newspaper publishers take a hard line at bargaining tables, lobby President Eisenhower to back away from criticisms of Taft-Hartley.

Twenty-five years ago this month:

Missing just one day and vowing it is "here to stay," the Washington Star resumes publication after obtaining the last of 14 new, five-year labor contracts. . . The U.S. needs a law limiting the size of newspaper chains to avoid monopolies, declares the Guild's executive board.

Vol. 71

Iss. 2

FEB 27

2004